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# DECORATION & FURNITURE

## OVERMANTELS.



TIMES have changed since the Middle Ages when the Court of Burgundy prescribed the number of shelves or steps one might use in his "dressoir" or sideboard, which was the remote ancestor of the modern overmantel. Five steps or shelves were allowed for the use of the queen during meals, four for princesses or duchesses, three for their children and for countesses or "grand dames," and other noble ladies had to be contented with two. These ancient sideboards were ornamented with elaborate carvings, and the shelves covered with napkins of silk or linen, the borders embroidered in open-work, or edged with point-lace.

Subsequently they took the shape either of *étagères* or of small cupboards, with drawers half way down, and rows of shelves on the top, on which ornamental plate, metal-work, Venetian glass, majolica, etc., were set out. Some of these dressers were placed against the wall; others were made movable, to permit circulation round them for the convenience of the attendants; and etiquette determined the number of stages for occasions of state and routine.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries panelled cabinets of exquisite workmanship became the vogue for the arrangement of knick-knack collections, while hanging brackets, as well as the mantel-shelf and console tables, served for the open display of decorative specimens. The hanging brackets especially were a prominent item of ornamental furniture, in Louis XIV.'s time, for the support of *buhl* clocks, busts, small bronzes, and porcelain vases.

Cabinets with glass fronts appeared early in the eighteenth century for the purpose of display, and have stood their ground ever since, supplemented by open wall and corner *étagères*. The modern overmantels are but modifications of the ancient shelf stages placed on the mantelpiece. The orthodox chimney-glass, for centuries considered as indispensable, has been, if not altogether discarded, reduced to the size of a small Venetian mirror with bevelled edges, framed in, flanked or topped, in *étagère* fashion, by shelves and compartments. For a picturesque display of artistic porcelain, pottery, and glass, of bronzes and knick-knacks of any kind, overmantels are certainly the most suitable arrangement. They bring the ornaments in a convenient line with the eye, and avoid the marring effect of mirage from the glass panes of a cabinet.

A small-sized Venetian mirror with bevelled edges should occupy the centre or part of the lower stage; well-chosen colored pieces of paper, leather, or velvet, silvered glass, painted tiles, or plain gilding will do duty for the panelling out of the various compartments. The color of the wood-work should be in harmony with the furniture and the wall-paper, but, as a rule, black picked out with gold looks well in almost every case.

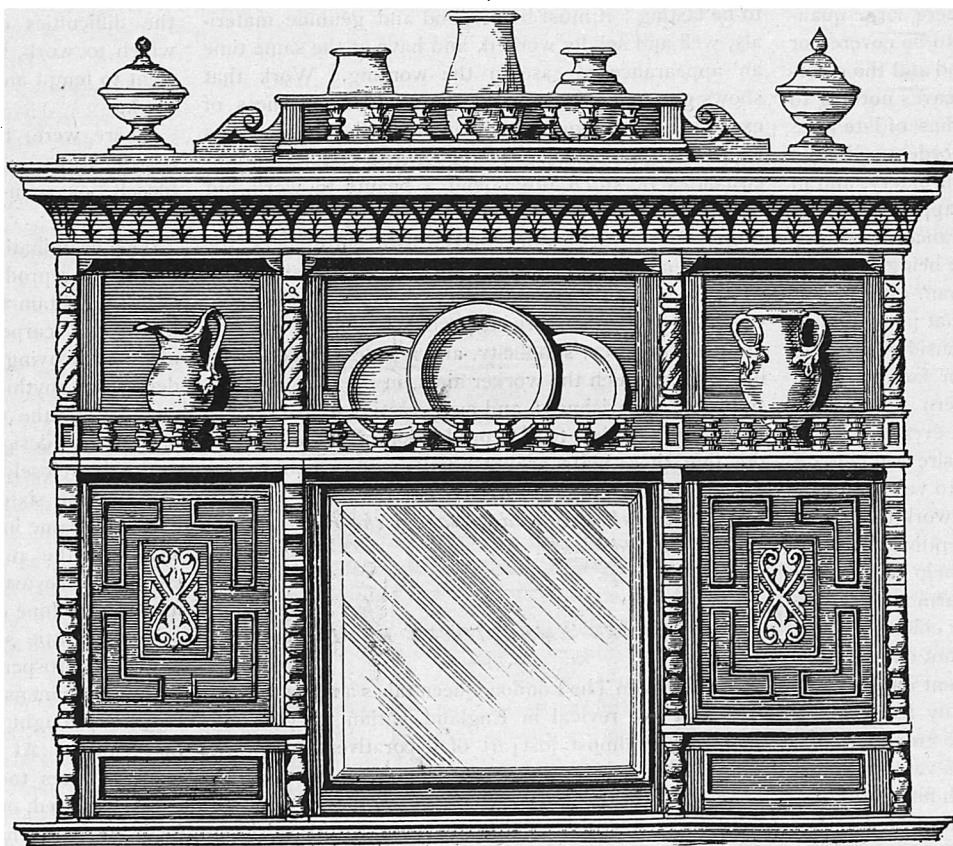
As to the architectural character of the superstructure, straight lines are preferable to curves and a top, slightly overhanging in the form of a cove or arch, can

be introduced with advantage. The three specimens of overmantels represented in our illustrations may serve as guides in this respect.

When the shape of an overmantel has been decided upon, the selection of the ornaments for its decoration has to be considered. Much of the ultimate effect depends upon the variety of colors and forms introduced, and upon their harmonious distribution over the various shelves and compartments.

Overdoors, which of late have likewise been utilized for the display of china, are constructed on the same principle as overmantels, and also the hanging wall or corner *étagères* which have come into fashion again.

Two of our illustrations are from recent designs published by Messrs. Howell & James, of London, and for the third we are indebted to Mr. J. H. Horsfall, the New York cabinet-maker. While the ornate character of the Elizabethan design will commend it to the favor of many whose rooms may be elaborately furnished in keeping with it, the Victorian overmantel, in its substantial simplicity, will perhaps be more generally adopted. It is best suited for the dining-room, as the other would be for the boudoir or reception-room. Mr. Horsfall's Jacobean design, with its solidly useful character, is equally appropriate for the library, for which it is indeed admirably adapted. The other mantels almost look as if they were designed exclusively for the display



OVERMANTEL IN JACOBESAN STYLE.

of *bric-à-brac*. In the case of the modest Jacobean there is little provision made for show of this kind; the shelves that are provided allow for just enough decoration to redeem the sombreness of the wood-work. Among the overmantel designs of Messrs. T. B. Stewart & Co., of New York, we recently saw one of the Moresque order of architecture especially worthy of notice. The upper portion of the ample mirror is gracefully curved by the pierced Moorish arch which partly conceals it. Smaller arches on either side are supported by slender columns which serve as the framework for *bric-à-brac* niches.

UNLESS it is absolutely necessary, it is better not to paste the back of screen panels, whatever may be the materials on which they are worked; but more especially satin or velvet, as it interferes with the straining of the work by the cabinet-maker.

## MAKING PICTURE SCREENS.

WELL-ARRANGED picture or scrap screens are not only very interesting to make, but are very pretty in effect, as each side has all the appearance of a continuous picture illustrative of some subject.

The framework can be made by a carpenter of the number of panels and size wished for. Three panels, each panel sixty-two inches high and twenty-two inches wide, make a good size for a drawing-room; and four panels six feet high and two feet wide, for a dining-room or library. The wood must be well seasoned, and each panel must be made of exactly the same size, so that all may be quite even when folded together. It looks best to have the bottom part of the framework made a little deeper than that at the top and the sides. Width of framework at the top and sides about two inches; width of frame at the bottom about two and a half inches. There should be two bars across, about two inches wide.

Get some unbleached calico at a dry goods store; it requires picking over, to take out the knots which are generally found in it. The width will be sufficient; the length required will depend on the height of the panels as well as the number of them, and can be easily calculated. Soak the calico in hot water to shrink it, and when it is nearly dry nail it with small tin tacks along the top, round the edge of the panel, pulling it very tight all the time, so as to stretch it as much as possible. Then fasten it down the sides and the bottom; do the other side of the panel the same. This requires a good deal of pulling, as it must be stretched tightly, and if a lady does not like to do it herself, a carpenter will do it for so much a panel. The cloth must be brought round the edge of the panel, so that the nails are on the outside edges and none on the front of the framework. Get a few cents' worth of common white size, cut it in small pieces and put it into a white preserve jar with a very little water at the bottom. Put it on a hot hearth to melt, stirring it occasionally with a piece of stick. When quite melted brush it on the cloth thinly but all over with a painter's brush; rather a large one is best, as it can be done sooner with it. Work quickly in a warm place, keeping the size hot until both sides of the cloth on each panel are sized. It will soon dry and be ready for papering. If the screen is to be covered with colored pictures, which are the most effective, buy what is called lining paper (white), sold in pieces twelve

yards long, where wall-papers are sold. Lay one of the panels on a table or large board, and measure off the length of paper required by laying it on the screen. Each side must be in one piece, as joints would show a crease. Six strips will be required for a three-leaved screen, and eight for a four-leaved. Lay one of the strips of paper on a panel, and, with good smooth, common flour paste, brush it thickly but evenly all over, using a brush similar to the one for sizing. It must be thoroughly and smoothly pasted, no spaces left or knots of paste, and it can then be turned over so as to lay the side on which the paste is on to the cloth. This is best done by two people, one at the top and the other at the bottom, taking hold of each corner, turning it, and laying it very evenly on to the cloth, arranging it carefully to fit the shape, but not to fold over the edges. This, at first, is a little troublesome, but practice soon makes it very easy. When laid smoothly dab it with a clean cloth, pressing it gently, and rubbing out

any creases or air bubbles, and this must be done quickly, before the paste gets dry. Cover both sides of the panel in the same way, and when all parts are dry size the paper all over in the same way as the cloth was sized, and then it is ready for the pictures.

If the cloth has been well stretched, and the paper properly pasted, the surface of the panel will be quite smooth, and as tight as a drum. Common flour paste is used to put on the pictures with, but before beginning work, it is wise to have a tolerable collection to select from. The colored pictures may be procured at various prices, and in many ways. Some screens have been priced at two or three hundred dollars, from being covered with very expensive pictures; but very good and amusing effects may be obtained with pictures costing much less, if judiciously selected. In arranging the pictures on the screen care must be taken to contrast the colors well, and it is a good plan to cover each panel in a different style. The easiest way of doing so is to put on pictures, without cutting them out, in somewhat regular order, and then to cut out flowers and arrange them round each one as if in a frame. Another mode is to cut out most of the pictures and arrange them in a confused way, part of a picture in one place and part elsewhere—any absurdity of composition is effective; flowers may be added occasionally, but not so frequently as in the first style. Another, and the most artistic, but the most difficult to arrange well, is for each panel to depict a distinct subject, such as spring, summer, autumn, and winter.

For Spring—Bright green trees and turf, birds singing, eggs, nests, crocuses and any other spring flowers; a little love-making, children grouped in various ways, and everything fresh and young.

For Summer—Ripe fruit, brilliant flowers, haymaking, fishing, boating, hot sunny views, and shady retreats, trees in full leaf.

For Autumn—Shooting, hunting, corn fields, reaping, gleaning, hop-picking, live and dead game, autumn-tinted trees, and the seasonable fruit and flowers.

For Winter—Skating and other winter sports, snow scenes enlivened by bits of red from robins, fires, or red cloaks, holly and mistletoe, old people, and everything else marking the end of the year, or of life.

All the subjects must blend well and run into each other, with no distinct outlines, so that they appear as one picture. It would be almost impossible to cut them out exactly to fit, but the overlapping should be as little as possible. To insure the best arrangement of any of the styles it is a good plan to pin the pictures on to the screen in various ways until the desired effect is arrived at; and, in pasting them on, be careful to press them well, and to leave no air bubbles or raised places. Do not put the pictures anywhere within half an inch of the edge of the panel, as that margin is required to put a beading or other ornament as a finish to the screen. When all the pictures are closely pasted on, look over them, and any little deficiencies or defects paint out with a little water-color paint to harmonize with the surrounding parts. It is then ready to be varnished and mounted.

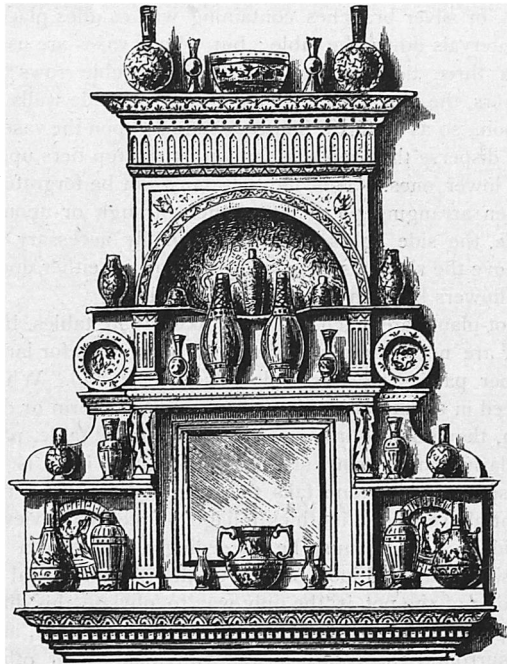
Send the screen to a good house-painter accustomed to varnishing, as it is very difficult for an amateur to do it properly. There are various ways of mounting or rather putting an ornamental finish round the edges of the screen, which may be left to individual taste; but gold beadings, leather in strips put on with ornamental nails, or a beading of wood, japanned, black outside and gold beading within, are all effective. Three pair of hinges must be fixed to each leaf of the screen, and it is finished.

Some screens are not varnished at all, and the colors certainly look softer, unvarnished, but smoke and dirt in time cause injury. Those who do not care to cover both sides of the screen with pictures can put them on one side only, with enamelled cloth on the other.

Screens can be made with less trouble if the panels be covered with glazed colored paper, blue, red, green, or maroon, with flowers or pictures cut out, leaving no margin, and then pasted on separately or in groups, so

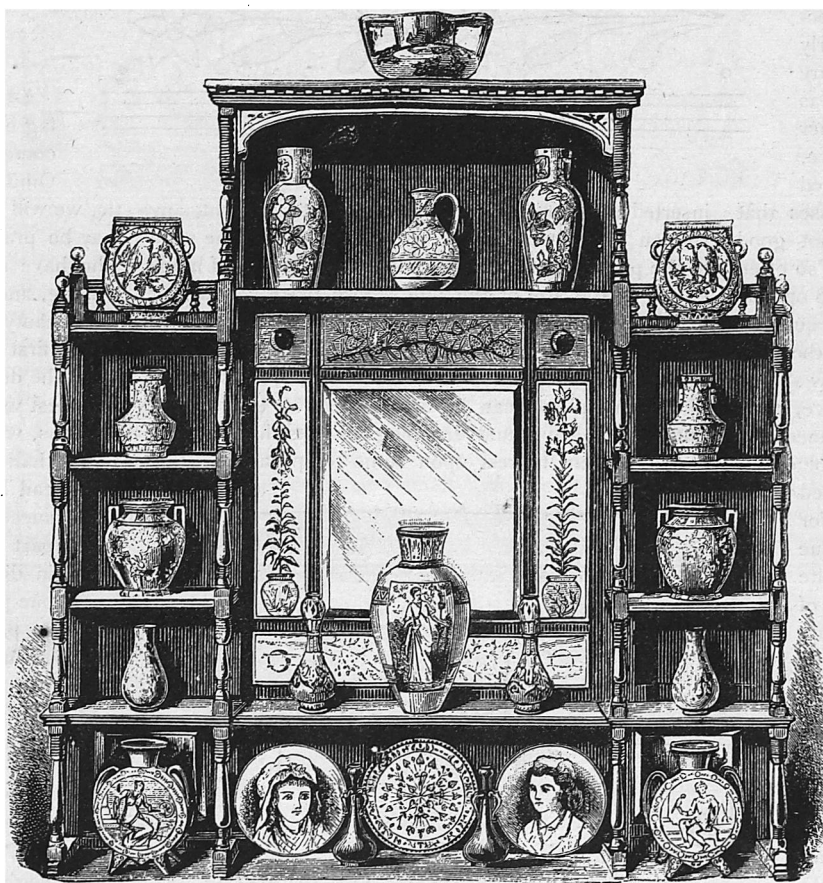
as to show a good deal of the colored paper forming the ground.

Some of the newest screens have the centre panel almost double the width of the two side ones, with the bulk of the scraps on the two sides, and the centre one covered with gold paper, and only a few of the best and most effective scraps arranged on it. The gold paper should be stretched tightly or it is apt to shrink. The side panels have a deep border at the base, cut in points



OVERMANTEL IN QUEEN ELIZABETH STYLE.

at the upper edge. Between each point a straight flower, such as a lily with leaves or an iris, is placed on a background of pale blue or green, previously pasted on. The rest of the scraps are arranged, as artistically as possible, up to the top, with a pretty border of flowers or leaves all round the edge. In the centre panel medallions of scraps are arranged on the gold background. The centre medallion is the largest, the four corners next in size, and the intermediate ones



OVERMANTEL IN QUEEN VICTORIA STYLE.

smaller still, and of a different shape. For the four-fold screens, panels of alternate gold and colored background look well, arranging each one with deep points top and bottom, and filling in with scraps. Another idea is a band of stamped gilt leather at the base of the screen then a band of satin, or satin sheeting, of a rich blue, green, or red, and then a second and narrow band of the leather. Above are all the scraps with a strip of gilt leather at the top (and up the sides if re-

quired). Satin sheeting is often used now, to form a dado to standing screens, with a heading of leaves or flowers, which can be had in strips from any of the stores where scraps are sold. The wooden frame of the screen is also often stained the same color as this dado, and left unvarnished.

#### DINNER-TABLE DECORATIONS.

SINCE the attention of artistic people has been directed to the practical application of their knowledge in the embellishment of their rooms and dinner tables in accordance with their own taste, a fuller knowledge of what is beautiful in shape and coloring has arisen, and much of the overcrowding and overloading, once fashionable, is condemned and discarded. Care is given to produce decorations that are beautiful and elegant rather than those which are costly and overwhelming. The crowding into a house of every description of furniture and ornament, merely because it is expensive and helps to display the wealth of the accumulator, is no longer considered to be in good taste, and the same rule regulates the display of ornaments on dinner and supper tables. Nor is it any longer considered necessary that every dinner table should be the exact counterpart of its neighbor; the individual taste of the hostess is allowed full play, and novel descriptions of decorations, provided they keep within certain broad bounds, are welcomed and approved.

The advancement of practical taste in decoration is much shown by the abandonment of many of the heavy receptacles for flowers, such as vases of three tiers, each tier crowded with costly and beautiful hothouse flowers; compound trumpet-shaped glasses of heavy outline, contrived so that the glass and foliage completely blocked the view across the table; épergnes handsome and massive in form, and filled to overflowing with rare fruits and flowers, and silver and china plaques covered with miniature tritons, camels, and other designs, handsome in themselves, but depressing to the spirits by their vastness and obliteration of everything else. These are now justly relegated to the sideboards, where their coloring and size are not out of keeping, and their places taken at the principal table with smaller and more elegant conceptions.

For flowers there are many descriptions of stands and vases—some of china, some of cut-glass, and others of looking-glass and plain glass, but all of low shapes, so as to enable the eye to look over and beyond them, and in which the flowers are arranged without crowding, each contributing to the refreshment and delight of the gazer instead of being a mere unit in a mass of hopeless and unmeaning coloring. Besides the flower vases, the table is further decorated with services of old china plates and dishes, not all matching in shape or pattern, but with a harmonizing color pervading the whole; Indian jars, very small, and quaint forms for holding single flowers; Parian and white china figures of children or Cupids either used for fruit or flowers; delicate tinted dessert dishes of various hues, queer-shaped silver or gold ladles and spoons, antique Venetian glass and its modern imitations, delicate hued and hand-embroidered napery; and many other refinements that, judiciously selected, are much more agreeable objects of contemplation than handsome dinner services and sets of silver and china ornaments in which the same design is repeated until it becomes wearisome.

With regard to the glass used about the table, the fashion of colored glass is highly to be commended, white glass, however fragile and exquisite in cutting,

failing to produce the same effect as tinted glass when artificial light is thrown upon it. The delicate hues of Salvati's modern imitation of old Venetian glass, the picturesque shapes of his wine glasses and finger glasses, and the diversities of their patterns, at once proclaim their title to be ranked among the best modern productions. The knowledge of how to combine different colors, so as to produce bright and yet harmonizing tints, seems to have been better understood by ancient